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Readings: *Toward a Composition Made Whole* *(Ch. 4-6)*

English 998, Multimodality, Multimedia and Digital Rhetoric in Composition

Jody Shipka writes, “What is crucial is that students leave their courses exhibiting a more nuanced awareness of the various choices they make, or even fail to make, throughout the process of producing a text and carefully consider the effect those choices might have on others” (p. 85). Hard to argue with this statement. One thing I like about this is Shipka’s small acknowledgment to failure, which is something I’m interested in and something I spent some time on in my thesis. I’d be interested in knowing how Shipka explains or embraces those “failed” choices in the composition classroom. Does she talk about those choices with her students? Does she explain how failure allows us to see success? Does she cast a positive light on failure, or does it remain attached to poor performance possessing a negative stigma? Shipka mentions “flexibility” quite a bit in this chapter and this book. What does flexibility to failure look like?

The SOGC Shipka talks about seems to be a good means of looking at the student’s text with a particular lens through the questions the students answered about their process and goals for their project. More or less, students can talk about their process and teachers can understand whether the students are meeting the goals in which they set forth. This provides students with an opportunity to be slightly engaged, possessing some sense of agency in how they want the teacher to approach their text. It reminds me of Elbow’s “cover letter” concept as she communicates on p. 115. With this method, Shipka assesses the SOGC and assesses the project. And, from what I gathered, it seems like the SOGCs throughout the semester are valued the same as the portfolio (?). From my knowledge on assessment, this type of assessment is more or less accompanied in portfolios—maybe Shipka works under the portfolio system—or aligns closely with primary trait analysis. I see the benefits and negatives of both assessment methods in the composition classroom. I’ve worked with both. When it comes to valuing process, I think portfolios communicate that well. I know KU allows us to use portfolios, but it isn’t really pitched that hard in the English department, and I’m a bit surprised by that. Although, not really. If the department values maintaining a certain student GPA average, the assumption would be that portfolios cause grade inflation. The idea of maintaining a student GPA level is absurd, in my opinion, on various levels. That belief is something I want to fight and, hopefully, will fight the rest of my career in the Academy. One doesn’t have to look far to acknowledge that each class is completely different, made of a different rhetorical situation: teacher, students, pedagogy, assignments, projects, etc. To expect an average is unrealistic at best. We would be generalizing students and placing them into a degree of sameness. I’m a bit surprised by Shipka’s lack of acknowledgment in the grading contract. In my opinion, that would be the best form of assessment in this type of classroom—one that truly values process and labor over product. And, the grading contract offers the most pure form of negotiation (play on her chapter title).

Question 1: How do we incorporate an awareness of “failed choices” in the writing classroom, and what does it look like to embrace failure in a multimodal classroom? In what different ways does the multimodal classroom allow us to study and examine failure, not in a negative light, but with a positive spin?

Question 2: The production and distribution of the traditional letter-grade doesn’t seem to be of much value in a classroom like Shipka’s and, probably, ours. In fact, it may go against what we value – process and negotiation. If we’re embracing the process and if we’re valuing negotiation, is there a reason why we aren’t using other forms of assessment that seem to align more appropriately with those values? Is there a reason why we aren’t emphasizing portfolios? Valuing the grading contract as our primary means of assessment? I appreciate the +/- scale much more than the traditional 4.0, but is that the best we can do? What are we communicating in our classrooms in terms of value, and is our assessment complimenting those values or going against those values?